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ABSTRACT

An ad hoc working group of the International Standards Organization met twice to study the feasibility of establishing an international standard on library performance measures. Having determined that library development in many countries could be significantly advanced through the availability of an international performance standard, the working group considered numerous key issues in the development of such a standard. Issues included a consideration of the evolution and development of library performance measures; the scope of the proposed standard; the content of and audience for a standard; the impact of a standard on stakeholder groups; objectives and benefits of a standard; problems associated with developing a standard; the potential for its implementation; and its impact on existing standards. It was concluded that these issues, as outlined throughout the report, need to be addressed in greater detail by a new working group. If the new working group determines that every country and type of library cannot implement either a basic or a more extensive set of performance measures, the group might develop a report for "prestandardization purposes." The goal of the group should be to develop a written draft standard within 24 months of its establishment. The recommendations are presented in both English and French. (Includes 16 references.) (KRN)

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FEASIBILITY OF AN INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ON

LIBRARY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

REPORT RECEIVED FROM THE ISO/TC46/SC8 'STATISTICS' AD-HOC GROUP

For consideration at the meeting 22 May 1992 in London.

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FEASIBILITY OF AN INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ON LIBRARY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

By

Charles R. McClure (Convener)
Pierre Carbone
Geoffrey Ford
Peter Hernon
Pascal Sanz

RECOMMENDATIONS [English text]

There is an extensive international interest in performance measures and their application to library planning, decision making and evaluation. The time is ideal for the international community to explore the development of international standards for library and information centre performance measures.

The recommendation of the Ad Hoc Working Group is that the development of an international standard on library performance measures is needed. It is the view of the Ad Hoc Working Group that library development in many countries could be significantly advanced through the availability of such a standard. In a number of countries there is little or no formal justification for assessing the quality of library services and no recognition that evaluation and use of performance measures is appropriate; nor is there an existing process by which regular and ongoing use of evaluation and performance measures assists in local or national decision making related to the provision of library services.

The Ad Hoc Working Group has given careful thought and consideration to the feasibility of such a standard. Numerous key issues in the development of such a standard will still require analysis, discussion and resolution. Those issues, as outlined throughout this report, will need to be addressed in greater detail by the working group that would be established by SC8 to develop such a standard.

The Ad Hoc Working Group recommends that a new Working Group be appointed with the charge of developing an international standard for library performance measures. If the new Working Group determines that every country and type of library cannot implement either a basic or a more extensive set of performance measures, the Working Group might develop a Type 2 Technical Report for "pre-standardization purposes" (IEC/ISO 1989). The goal of this working group should be to develop a written draft standard within 24 months of being established. The working group should report progress regularly to SC8.

The new Working Group should have wide representation from the membership of SC8, with a minimum of five countries participating in and supporting this work. (If at all possible, members of the working group should have access to INTERNET to speed and improve communication.) It should be clearly understood that members of the group will be actively involved in the development of the standard and that they will need to participate regularly in accomplishing the working group's tasks.

ISO TC46/SC8 /Ad hoc WG "Library Performance Measures"

RECOMMENDATIONS [Texte francais]

La mesure des résultats et leur application aux bibliothèques pour la planification, la prise de décision et l'évaluation rencontre un intérêt considérable au plan international. Le moment est idéal pour que la communauté internationale s'engage dans le développement de normes internationales pour la mesure des résultats des bibliothèques et centres de documentation.

La recommandation du groupe de travail ad hoc est que le développement d'une norme internationale sur la mesure des résultats des bibliothèques est une nécessité. Le groupe de travail ad hoc est d'avis que le développement des bibliothèques dans beaucoup de pays pourrait avancer de manière significative si une telle norme était disponible. Dans un certain nombre de pays, l'appréciation de la qualité des services des bibliothèque s'appuie peu ou pas du tout sur une justification explicite, l'évaluation et l'utilisation de mesures des résultats n'y sont pas jugées opportunes ; il n'y existe pas de démarche par laquelle une utilisation régulière et suivie de l'évaluation et des mesures de résultats serve d'aide à la prise de décision à l'échelon local ou national pour le fonctionnement des services de bibliothèques.

Le groupe de travail ad hoc a examiné avec soin la faisabilité d'une telle norme. Nombre de points clé dans le développement d'une telle norme demandent encore à être analysés, discutés et résolus. Ces points, comme il est souligné tout au long du rapport, devront être traités de façon plus détaillée par le groupe de travail qui se verra confier par le SC8 le développement d'une telle norme.

Le groupe de travail ad hoc recommande de confier à un nouveau groupe de travail la charge de développer une norme internationale sur la mesure des résultats des bibliothèques. Si le groupe de travail détermine que tous les pays et tous les types de bibliothèques ne peuvent pas mettre en oeuvre soit un ensemble de mesures de résultats de base soit un ensemble plus étendu, le groupe de travail pourrait développer un rapport technique de type 2 "à des fins de pré-normalisation" (Directive IEC/ISO, 1989). Le but de ce groupe de travail est de développer un projet écrit de norme dans un délai de 24 mois après sa constitution. Le groupe de travail devra faire régulièrement son rapport au SC8 sur l'avancement de ses travaux.

Le nouveau groupe de travail doit représenter largement les membres du SC8, avec un minimum de cinq pays participant à ce travail et le soutenant, (si possible, les membres du groupe de travail devront avoir accès au réseau Internet pour accélérer et améliorer entre eux la communication). Il devra être clairement établi que les membres de ce comité devront s'engager activement dans le développement de la norme et qu'ils devront participer régulièrement à l'accomplissement des tâches du groupe de travail.

BACKGROUND

This section of the report provides a background to the project, the charge of the Ad Hoc Working Group, and a brief overview of developments related to library performance measures. It provides a context for the discussion of the feasibility and appropriateness of an international standard for library performance measures.

Ad Hoc Working Group

Upon invitation of the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) by the secretariat of the U.S. TAG to ISO/TC 46, Charles R. McClure serves as the chair of the Ad Hoc working group. The Ad Hoc Working Group is comprised of representatives from the United States, Great Britain, and France. The Ad Hoc Working Group is authorized under SC 8, chaired by Alan MacDougall.

The Ad Hoc Working Group, formed in September, 1991, is comprised of Geoffrey Ford (Great Britain), Pierre Carbone and Pascal Sanz (France), and Peter Hernon and Charles R. McClure (United States). The group held its first meeting in London, December 2-3, 1991; it held a second meeting in Paris, April 2-3, 1992. The final report will be delivered to the SC 8 meeting in London, May 18, 1992.

Charge

The purpose of the working group is to study the feasibility of establishing an international standard on library performance measures. The group was charged with the responsibility of developing a written report specifying the feasibility of developing such a standard.

Organization of the Report

The report first defines key terms related to such a standard, offers a specific recommendation, and identifies and reviews specific questions/issues that bear on the group's decision regarding the recommendation. The discussion of the questions is intended to provide a rationale that may be of use to the SC 8 as it considers the Ad Hoc Working Group's recommendation.

KEY TERMS

The following are not intended to be formal definitions of key terms in this field. Rather, they are intended to provide a sense of how the working group is using such terms. Performance measures are indicators of how well the library performs a specific activity, accomplishes objectives, affects related institutional and societal goals, and meets user information needs. Performance measures include input, process, output, and outcome measures--following from the general systems model (see Figure 1). Performance measures comprise one aspect of evaluating library

services, collections, programs, and operations. Within an evaluation context, performance measures may address:

- Extensiveness: how much of something the library provides, e.g., number of books circulated per week;
- Efficiency: the use of resources in the library's provision of something, e.g., cost per title circulated; and
- Effectiveness: how well the library does something or the degree to which a library service, collection, program, or operation meet stated objectives, e.g., number of books cataloged that circulated during their first year on the shelf.

Measurement, the process of assigning numbers to represent some phenomenon, can occur independently of evaluation. Evaluation, however, typically includes a measurement process. That process may rely on a quantitative or qualitative approach, or a mixture of the two.

KEY QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

The following key questions and issues are not intended to be a comprehensive discussion of factors affecting the development of an international standard on library performance measures. They do, however, provide insights into the basis by which the group developed its recommendation.

What is the background and evolution of the development of library performance measures?

During recent years, there has been some considerable attention given to the development, design, testing, and use of performance measures for library and information centers--particularly in the United States and Great Britain. DeProspo, Altman and Beasley (1973) set the tone for much of this research by suggesting that the quality of library and information center services should be considered in light of a user perspective. Such a user perspective focuses attention on library outputs, outcomes, and impacts on a range of possible indicators.

Since DeProspo, Altman and Beasley's ground breaking work a number of recent efforts have lead to development of practical and reliable performance measures for library and information centers. These efforts include work done by Zweizig and Rodger (1982); Van House, Lynch, McClure, Zweizig and Rodger (1987); Moore (1989); Van House, Weil, and McClure (1990); King Research, Ltd. (1990); and Griffiths and King (1991).

These sources report studies or empirical work on the development and testing of library performance measures. Additional discussion of issues and topics related to the use and application of

performance measures in libraries can be found in representative works such as Carbone (1989), Ford (1989); Van House, Weil, and McClure (1990, 3-25); British Library (1990); Hernon and McClure (1990,138-154); and MacDougall (1991).

These (and other writings that they reference) demonstrate that there is still much debate on the role and usefulness of library/information center performance measures. Some argue that there are conceptual limitations to their use, some measures fail to assess adequately that which they were intended to measure, and in most cases, the resulting data are non-comparable across different types of library settings (Hernon and McClure, 1990, 138-154). Despite these and related concerns, the issue remains: How do library and information professionals demonstrate the quality of information resources and services provided by library and information centers?

A current trend in the United States is movement away from the development of performance measures in isolation, to link them more directly to the planning process (McClure, Owen, Zweizig, Lynch and Van House, 1986), and to reconceptualize them into the larger library management and evaluation process. A number of researchers believe that greater attention should be given to integrating planning, vision statement development, performance measures, and data management, into a more comprehensive library management approach (McClure, Van House, and Hert, 1991).

A comprehensive review of the literature suggests that much of the empirical work in identifying, developing, using, and reporting library performance measures occurs in Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Great Britain and the United States. There is, however, increasing interest in the topic in a number of other countries around the world. It is likely that such interest will grow in the near future due to the increasing need for libraries to demonstrate their accountability and value, for governments to set priorities of what will--and will not--be funded, and for libraries to determine which programs, services, collections, and activities most effectively meet user information needs.

What is the scope of the proposed standard?

The working group believes that all libraries that conform to the general model depicted in Figure 2 have the potential for adopting the use of library performance measures. Libraries interact with their funding sources and their user populations, providing a range of services to those user groups. Clearly, there are a range of inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes (see Figure 1) associated with this interaction. The interactions raise issues of accountability and overall quality of the library. Thus, the proposed standard is directly concerned with the quality of libraries.

The libraries might be located within a developed or developing

country and need not all have the same level of institutional, funding, or societal support. Different types and uses of performance measures may be appropriate in different countries. It may be appropriate to develop two sets of performance measures, basic and more extensive. Different countries and different types of libraries may choose either set. Moreover, "performance measures" is an umbrella term that can include a host of possible measures having different value in different situations.

What would be the content of such a standard?

It is likely that such a standard would evolve over time, but initially, the standard would:

- Identify the types of data that should be collected;
- Describe a process for the collection of performance measure data;
- Identify the types of libraries that would be affected by the standard;
- Identify appropriate performance measures that the data could be used to produce;
- Suggest approaches for linking performance measures into library planning and management; and
- Suggest methods for analyzing and reporting performance measures.

As can be seen, the above represent a broad coverage of topics and issues related to performance measures.

What is the audience for the proposed standard?

Figure 2 suggests that the audience for an international standard on library performance measures would be funders, librarians, and user populations. Funders might be governmental (national, international, regional, or local units), or non-governmental (organizations, associations, societies, etc.). Within libraries, the audience includes directors and others concerned with the quality of library services or otherwise engaged in decision making. The user population is current and potential customers who place, or might place, demands on library collections, services, and programs.

These three primary audiences might encourage the adaption of performance measures to assess "value for money" and/or the degree to which the library meets information needs of its customers.

How might such a standard affect various stakeholder groups?

Key stakeholder groups that would be affected by such a standard include librarians, government officials, funders, library customers, library/information science professional associations, and library educators. Possible effects on each of these groups will be discussed in turn.

Librarians will have to commit time and energy to the collection, analysis, reporting, and use of performance measures. The performance measures may increase the degree to which librarians are held accountable for the quality of library services, collections, and programs. Moreover, the availability of performance measures would assist the librarians better explain the nature of the library and how it contributes to the community.. It is also likely that such a standard would require libraries to better organize and coordinate data collection activities within their particular country. Finally, the use of performance measures may increase the demand for services--this demand may outstrip the resources available to support those services.

Performance measures would assist funders to make explicit their expectations for "quality" library collections, services, and programs. The availability of performance measures may increase demands on funders for more and broader types of resources to support libraries. Thus, funders may assess libraries on a more realistic basis than they do currently. Funders, however, may not have the knowledge to use performance measure data appropriately and may make inappropriate comparisons among libraries or between libraries and other types of organizations. The performance measures could assist funders establish priorities for what should or should not be funded; the measures could assist funders determine the degree to which they receive "value for money;" and such measures may provide evidence in some countries, that funders cannot afford some types of library services.

Library customers are likely to become more knowledgeable about the quality of library collections, services, and programs. They would be better able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the library and perhaps make better decisions as to which library, or library service, they prefer to use (due to the quality of services). The performance measures are also likely to increase expectations and demands on library services. However, the performance measurement data may also offer support for eliminating a particular service (despite it being in demand) because of costs or other factors.

Another important group of stakeholders related to the development of such a standard is library/information science educators. Were such a standard developed, a significant educational effort would have to be launched so that (1) library/information science educators could become knowledgeable about the topic, and (2) they could then teach librarians already in the field as well as students about performance measures. In short, such a standard would place additional attention (and revisions) on the management

component in the curriculum. It would also put additional responsibilities on professional associations to support training and education programs in this area.

Objectives and Benefits

The development of an international standard on library performance measures offers a number of possible objectives and benefits. Because the objectives also suggest benefits from such a standard, they are listed here together. Objectives and benefits would be to:

- Increase awareness that library evaluation and strategic planning are part of the management process;
- Provide a better means for libraries to demonstrate accountability, value for money, and benefits/impacts on their customers and society;
- Improve the coordination of national and international data collection efforts;
- Improve the process by which national data collection activities occur;
- Encourage the education/training of librarians and others who would collect, analyze, and use performance measure data;
- Exchange knowledge among interested countries, libraries, library associations, government agencies, and others regarding the adaption and use of performance measures;
- Agree on and accept common terminology related to the development and use of performance measures; and
- Improve the overall quality of data that describes library collections, programs, operations, and services.

Overall, such a standard could be a major factor contributing to the status and impact of libraries.

Problems

While it is clear that a number of benefits might result from the development of an international standard on library performance measures, significant problems would also need to be resolved. These include:

- There is not common worldwide terminology regarding performance measures; indeed, some languages lack words to express underlying concepts related to performance measures, others have competing terminology for similar concepts;

- Some governments (or other organizations and individuals) may use performance measures for purposes other than improving library services;
- Performance measures do not and should not be construed as representing the whole range of appropriate and necessary library evaluation techniques;
- It may be very difficult for all libraries to collect performance measure data (as recommended in such a standard) in a consistent manner;
- The extent to which countries my require libraries to comply with such a standard is unclear;
- Depending on the status and evolution of libraries in a particular country, different types and levels of performance measures may be needed;
- Any performance measures adopted might need to change and be updated as nations, communities, and libraries change and develop;
- Librarians, government officials, and others may lack the knowledge and skills needed to utilize performance measures effectively; and
- The conceptual and research basis for library performance measures is still evolving; uses and applications of performance measures may be inappropriate until we better understand the conceptual framework for library performance measures.

While it is possible to identify these problems, specific strategies for solving them are less clear and, in some cases are problematical at this time.

Could such a standard be implemented and with what likelihood of success?

The likelihood that such a standard would be implemented successfully depends on the degree to which the problems (outlined above) can be minimized. This is likely to vary from country to country depending on:

- The country's experience with library data collection, planning, evaluation, and performance measures;
- The library's experience with data collection, planning, evaluation, and performance measures; and
- The extent to which funders provide resources to support data collection activities and the production of performance

measures.

Implementation could take place over time and one should not expect it to occur at the same pace in all countries. Moreover, successful implementation of performance measures would depend on the level and type of performance measures recommended in the standard and the process by which the data are collected. The standards should include both the basic and more extensive sets of performance measures and the procedures by which the measurements are to be made. Successful implementation may also require a periodic review and development process to keep the standard current with library practice.

How would such a standard affect existing/proposed (1) government standards, (2) professional standards, (3) national standards, and (4) international standards?

Currently, it is known that Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, the United States, and Scandinavian countries have government policies related to the collection of library statistics. Additional investigation is needed to determine which other countries have such policies and to assess the nature of those policies. In the United States, for example, government policies also exist at the state level with the state library responsible for some data collection activities.

Also, it is likely that professional associations, societies, and individual libraries will sponsor the collection of library statistics and produce a range of performance measures--such certainly is true in the United States, Great Britain, and France. Indeed, the history of such data collection activities and responsibilities among the Federal government, state government, and professional associations in the United States is disjointed, uneven, and historically, resulted in poor coordination of library data (Williams, 1991).

The degree to which a standard on library performance measures would affect these existing policies and standards would depend on the actual nature and content of the standards in place and the degree to which the standard developed supports existing national policies. Additional investigation into the nature of existing policies would be needed in order to address this question more completely.

OVERVIEW OF KEY ISSUES

The discussion above suggests that the developed countries are giving increased attention to the development and use of library performance measures; it is less certain what interest and activity are occurring with library performance measures in developing countries. Initially, the Ad Hoc Working Group has determined that a number of "developed" countries might best be characterized as "developing" countries in their knowledge

and use of library performance measures.

The overview also suggests that much information and research about library performance measures simply are not available at this time. Thus, addressing the key issues requires the Ad Hoc Working Group to offer its best view at this time. We would anticipate that should the TC46/SC 8 committe decide to proceed with the development of such a standard that a considerable amount of research and development would have to occur in the process of developing a standard.

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Figure 1
General Systems Model

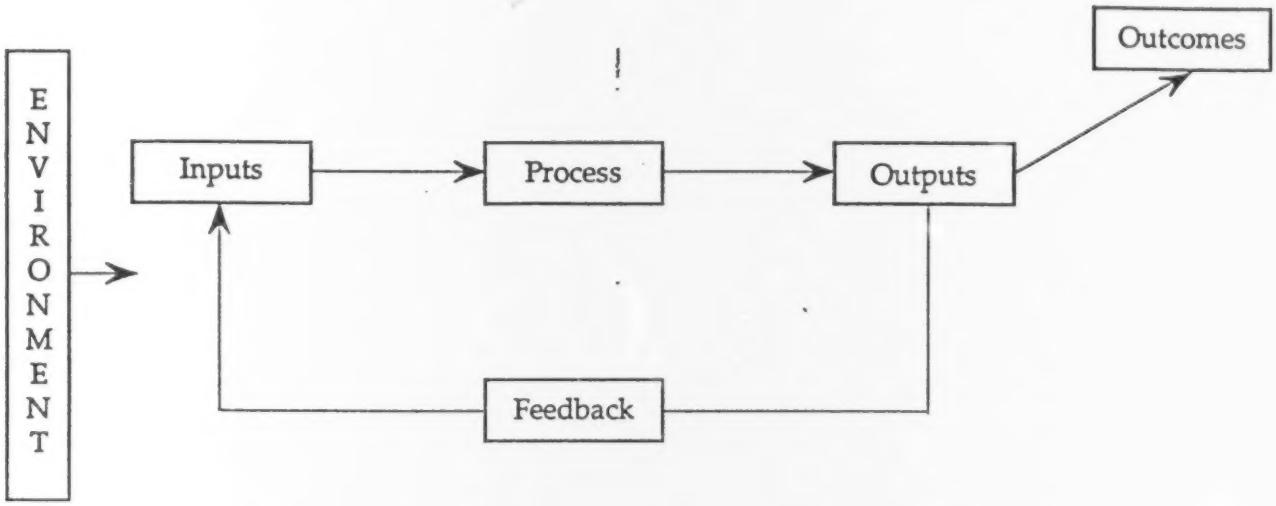

Figure 2
Library Components